

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 6679

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, IS
SUBJECT: FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY: RECENT EVENTS HAVE PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE THE PART PLAYED BY THE CABINET AND BY INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS IN THE FORMULATION OF DECISIONS OF THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT IN FIELDS OF SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THE SECRETARY'S VISIT GAVE US A GLIMPSE OF THE PRIME MINISTER IN ACTION AND REVEALED THAT, WHILE HE IS AN ABLE PARLIAMENTARIAN AND A STRONG LEADER, HE IS A NEO-PHYTE IN INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS. THE VISIT ALSO REVEALED BEGIN'S WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT OTHER MINISTERS TO PRESENT THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEWS. IT IS PARTICULARLY NOTICE-
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ABLE THAT HE HAS LEFT ECONOMIC POLICY TO EHRILCH. THE RECENT CABINET DECISIONS ABOUT SETTLEMENTS IN THE WEST BANK, ON THE OTHER HAND, REVEALED AN APPARENT LACK OF MINISTERIAL COORDINATION. OF PARTICULAR INTEREST IN THE WEEKS AHEAD WILL BE TO SEE WHETHER THAT LACK OF COORDINATION INDICATES THAT DIVERGENT VIEWS MAY DEVELOP BETWEEN CABINET MINISTERS; OF SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE WILL BE THE

POSSIBILITY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEGIN AND DAYAN. FOR THE TIME BEING, HOWEVER, OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT BEGIN REMAINS VERY MUCH IN CONTROL. END SUMMARY

2. BEGIN'S CONDUCT OF DISCUSSIONS. THE RECENT DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE SECRETARY AND THE ISRAELI MINISTERIAL TEAM PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE PRIME MINISTER BEGIN IN ACTION AS HE PREPARES FOR POSSIBLE NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL'S ARAB NEIGHBORS. OBSERVING THE PRIME MINISTER, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION OF AN INDIVIDUAL STELL FEELING HIS WAY IN THE REALM OF INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS. THIS IS NOT TO CAST ASPERSIONS ON BEGIN'S ABILITY OR LEADERSHIP --- HE CONTINUES TO BE AN ABLE AND EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARIAN IN THE KNESSET AND A STRONG AND FORCEFUL LEADER IN THE CABINET. HOWEVER, TO THE EXTENT THAT HIS PERFORMANCE WAS INDICATIVE OF HOW HE WOULD CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA, HE APPEARS NOT YET TO BE PREPARED FOR THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF A MULTILATERAL NEGOTIATION.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER WAS EFFECTIVE IN PRESENTING ISRAEL'S POSITION AND IN RESTATING THE REASONS WHICH LIE BEHIND ISRAEL'S SECURITY CONCERNS, BUT HE WAS NOT EFFECTIVE IN RESPONDING TO THE SECRETARY'S COMMENTS NOR IN ANSWERING OR REBUTTING ARGUMENTS. THIS WAS UNEXPECTED, IN VIEW OF BEGIN'S 29 YEARS OF PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCE
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AND HIS JUSTIFIED REPUTATION FOR DEBATING SKILL, AND MAY REFLECT HIS DECISION NOT TO REVEAL HIS NEGOTIATING POSITION ("WE WANT TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE ARABS, NOT WITH THE U.S.") RATHER THAN HIS LACK OF PREPARATION FOR NEGOTIATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, BY HIS OWN PUBLIC STATEMENTS, BEGIN IS COMMITTED TO NEGOTIATIONS IN WHICH NOTHING IS EXCLUDED FROM CONSIDERATION. THUS HE WILL BE FORCED TO RESPOND TO CONTENTIOUS AND DIFFICULT POINTS RAISED BY THE ARABS AND, WHILE HE MAY BE PREPARED FOR THESE DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS IF AND WHEN A GENEVA CONFERENCE RECONVENES, HIS PERFORMANCE TO DATE GIVES SCANT EVIDENCE HE IS READY. IT IS DIFFICULT TO AVOID THE CONCLUSION THAT THE ELECTION OF BEGIN AS PRIME MINISTER HAS INDEED DELAYED PROGRESS TOWARD GENEVA -- NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF BEGIN'S STRONG VIEWS ON THE WEST BANK AND THE PLO, BUT ALSO BECAUSE HE IS A NEWCOMER TO THE TOUGH WORLD OF INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION. ONE CAN ALSO SPECULATE, OF COURSE, THAT THE DELAY IS DUE TO NEITHER OF THESE REASONS BUT IS A DELIBERATE BEGIN TACTIC. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT BEGIN'S UNEVEN PERFORMANCE WAS NOT RELATED TO HIS NOT YET HAVING LEARNED THE SUBTLEITIES OF INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS, BUT WAS DUE TO HIS BASIC

INFLEXIBILITY AND DOGMATISM. WE DISCUSS THIS VIEW IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE.

4. IT WAS ALSO OF INTEREST THAT DURING THE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SECRETARY, BEGIN PERMITTED OTHER CABINET MINISTERS TO CARRY THE BURDEN OF ISRAELI ARGUMENTS MORE THAN WE HAD ANTICIPATED. FOR EXAMPLE, WEIZMAN DID NOT MOST OF THE ISRAELI PRESENTATION ON LEBANON, DAYAN WAS CALLED ON TO DISCUSS THE WEST BANK, ETC. THIS WILLINGNESS TO SHARE THE BURDEN AND TO DRAW ON THE EXPERTISE OF OTHER CAPABLE LEADERS IS AN ENCOURAGING TREND. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT REFLECTS A LESSENING OF BEGIN'S AUTHORITY BUT, IN FACT, ILLUSTRATES THE STRENGTH OF HIS POSITION BECAUSE IT SHOWS HIS UNDERSTANDING OF HIS ROLE AS LEADER AND OF
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THE CAPABILITIES OF THE MEN AROUND HIM.

5. A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF BEGIN'S DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY HAS BEEN THE MANNER IN WHICH THE ECONOMIC POLICY-MAKING APPARATUS FOR THE GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PLACED AT THE OUTSET ENTIRELY IN THE HANDS OF SIMCHA EHRLICH. THE LIBERAL TEAM AND ITS CIVIL SERVICE TECHNICIANS HAVE BEEN HARD AT WORK TRYING TO TRANSLATE THE GENERALLY FREE ENTERPRISE LIBERAL PHILOSOPHY INTO CONCRETE GOVERNMENT POLICIES. THE ONLY REAL ATTENTION-GETTER SO FAR

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HAS BEEN THE GOVERNMENT ACTION IN JULY WHICH REDUCED
SUBSIDIES AND CUT BUDGET EXPENDITURES. THIS MET WITH GEN-
ERAL PUBLIC APPROVAL BECAUSE OF THE WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION THAT SOMET
HING ALONG THIS LINE HAD TO BE DONE TO CONTAIN
INFLATION.

6. IT APPEARS QUITE LIKELY THAT MORE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES
IN TERMS OF TAXATION, EXPENDITURE AND EMPLOYMENT WILL BE
MUCH MORE CONTROVERSIAL AND WILL BRING EHRlich INTO
CONFLICT NOT ONLY WITH HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS BUT ALSO
WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT. A CASE IN
POINT IS THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED PROPOSAL TO REDUCE THE
CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS IN THE NEXT BUDGET. THE EFFECT
OF SUCH A MEASURE WOULD FALL HARDEST ON THE LOW-INCOME
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GROUP. ELEMENTS OF THE LIKUD WHICH FIND MUCH OF THEIR
POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THIS GROUP ARE ALREADY VOICING CON-
CERN. OTHER
EHRlich PROPOSALS TO CUT THE BUDGET BY
REDUCING SOCIAL SERVICES WILL HAVE SIMILAR RESULTS.

7. UNTIL NOW, BEGIN APPARENTLY HAS PAID NO ATTENTION TO
ECONOMIC MATTERS. ASSUMING THAT EHRlich'S POLICIES WILL
AROUSE CONTROVERSY, IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER BEGIN
WILL NOT FIND IT NECESSARY TO RESTRICT EHRlich'S PRESENT
INDEPENDENCE OF ACTION IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE.
WHILE FOREIGN POLICY IS THE MOST VISIBLE ELEMENT IN BEGIN'S
POPULAR POLITICAL SUPPORT TO DATE, HE WOULD BE FOOLISH
TO IGNORE THE SEVERE POLITICAL DAMAGE WHICH AN UNPOPULAR
ECONOMIC PROGRAM COULD INFLICT ON THE COHESIVENESS
OF THE LIKUD AND HIS OWN POLITICAL POSITION.

8. MINISTERIAL DECISIONS. A RECENT EVENT WHICH
AFFORDED AN INSIGHT INTO THE CABINET'S DECISION-MAKING
PROCESS WAS THE APPARENT LACK OF MINISTERIAL COORDINATION
ON THE RECENT DECISIONS REGARDING THE WEST BANK. THE DE-
CISION OF AUGUST 14 TO PROVIDE THE SAME LEVEL OF SERVICES
TO ARAB RESIDENTS OF THE WEST BANK AS THAT PROVIDED TO
RESIDENTS OF ISRAEL WAS AGREED UPON BY THE FULL CABINET

BUT OBVIOUSLY HAD NOT BEEN WELL-STAFFED. SOME THREE WEEKS LATER IT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN INEFFECTIVELY CO-ORDINATED AMONG THE VARIOUS MINISTRIES AND AGENCIES WHICH WILL HAVE TO IMPLEMENT THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION. A SECONDARY ILLUSTRATION OF THE LACK OF COORDINATION ON THAT OCCASION WAS THE ILL-ADVISED STATEMENT OF THE CABINET SECRETARY AFTER THE CABINET MEETING WHEN HE MADE HIS WELL-KNOWN REFERENCE TO THE FACT THAT THE TERRITORIES WERE NOT BEING ANNEXED BECAUSE THEY ALREADY BELONGED TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

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9. THE DECISION ON AUGUST 17 TO APPROVE PUBLICLY THREE SETTLEMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN CONSIDERED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT OFFERS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF AN APPARENT LACK OF COORDINATION. THE PERTINENT MINISTERIAL SETTLEMENTS COMMITTEE SESSION WAS ATTENDED BY ONLY TWO OF ITS SEVEN APPOINTED MINISTERS, AND THE DECISION BECAME KNOWN NOT THROUGH A COMMITTEE OF CABINET ANNOUNCEMENT, BUT BY A LEAK. WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT THE ISRAELI CABINET HAS SUDDENLY BECOME INEFFECTIVE AND THAT COORDINATION AMONG MINISTERS NO LONGER EXISTS; NEVERTHELESS, THE IMAGE OF BEGIN'S GOVERNMENT AS A SMOOTHLY FUNCTIONING MONOLITHIC BODY CERTAINLY HAS BEEN TRANISHED. THAT IMAGE-- AND FLAWS IN THAT IMAGE -- ARE PRODUCTS OF THE CABINET'S DESIRE OF SECRECY. DETERMINED TO PREVENT LEAKS, THE GOVERNMENT DELIBERATES IN SECRET AND THEN ANNOUNCES ITS DECISIONS SUDDENLY. IF THE PROCESS WORKS AND THERE ARE NO LEAKS, THE CABINET APPEARS WELL-COORDINATED. LEAKS, WHEN THEY OCCUR, REVEAL (NOT UNSURPRISINGLY) THAT THE GOVERNMENT DIES INDEED HAVE SOME COORDINATION PROBLEMS.

10. COORDINATION IS PERHAPS MORE NECESSARY FOR THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THERE IS A MORE STRINGENT DIVISION OF LABOR AMONG MINISTERS. IN THE RABIN GOVERNMENT, ANY MINISTER COULD (AND DID) DISCUSS ANY SUBJECT HE WISHED IN CABINET MEETINGS. IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT (AS WEIZMAN TOLD A GROUP OF ATTACHES AUGUST 31) MINISTERS ARE STICKING TO THEIR OWN MINISTRIES AND ARE NOT ADVISING OTHER MINISTERS ON HOW TO RUN THEIR AFFAIRS. THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE SEES THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S DECISIONS AND CABINET DECISIONS ARE IMPLEMENTED; IT DOES NOT ARGUE, DISCUSS, OR PRESENT ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS. THE CABINET IS THE COORDINATING DEVICE IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, AND AS A RESULT LAPSES IN COORDINATION ARE ALL THE MORE OBVIOUS WHEN THEY OCCUR.

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11. DIVERGENCES BETWEEN MINISTERS? IN THIS SITUATION -- WHICH PERHAPS SHOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED IN THE EARLY DAYS OF A GOVERNMENT ADJUSTING TO POWER AFTER SO LONG IN OPPOSITION -- WE WILL BE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN WHETHER DIVERGENT VIEWS EXIST AND/OR DEVELOP BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT LEADERS. ON ONE NOTABLE OCCASION -- AT THE SECRETARY'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MINISTERIAL TEAM -- AND ON OTHER OCCASIONS, IT HAS APPEARED THAT DAYAN IS CHAFING UNDER THE RESTRICTIONS HE MUST FEEL. HE SOMETIMES APPEARS INATTENTIVE AND INDEED DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT HIS DINNER FOR THE SECRETARY DAYAN APPEARED TO NAP. AT OTHER TIMES HE NERVOUSLY SITS ON THE EDGE OF HIS CHAIR AS THOUGH IMPATIENT TO BREAK INTO THE CONVERSATION. HOWEVER, THIS IS CLASSIC DAYAN BEHAVIOR, OBSERVED ALSO WHEN GOLDA MEIR WAS HIS PRIME MINISTER. IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THE SEEMINGLY SMOOTH WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH BEGIN WILL ERODE SOON.

12. OTHER MINISTERS HAVE FROM TIME-TO-TIME EXPRESSED VIEWS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT THAN THOSE OF THE PRIME MINISTER. FOR EXAMPLE, BOTH WEIZMAN AND SHARON HAVE IN THE PAST PUBLICLY DECLARED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO TALK TO THE PLO. BEYOND THESE TOP FOUR, THE VIEWS OF OTHER MINISTERS ARE NOT SO IMPORTANT; INDEED, THE PRESENCE OF BURG AND EHRlich ON THE TEAM WHICH MET WITH THE SECRETARY CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO INTRA-COALITION CONSIDERATIONS MORE THAN TO ANY CONTRIBUTION THEY MIGHT HAVE TO THE SUBJECTS UNDER DISCUSSION. CLEARLY THE KEY RELATIONSHIP IS THAT BETWEEN BEGIN AND DAYAN.

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13. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS FOREIGN MINISTER CAN BE DESCRIBED AS THAT BETWEEN AN IDEOLOGUE AND A PRAGMATIST. BEGIN APPROACHES NEGOTIATIONS AS HE WOULD A PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT. HE PREPARES WELL, HE PRESENTS HIS POSITION LUCIKLY BUT THEN DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE PREPARED TO RESPOND OR TO PARTICIPATE IN A DISCUSSION OF COUNTER POINTS. DAYAN, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS CREATIVE AND ABLE TO DRAW ON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN DEALING WITH NON-ISRAELIS TO SEEK SOLUTIONS WHICH MAY REQUIRE COMPROMISES FROM EACH SIDE. THIS DIFFERENCE WAS POINTED OUT IN A DAVR COMMENT AUGUST 15: "BEGIN AND THE LIKUD ARE MOTIVATED BY FAITH, MOSTLY MYSTICAL-RELIGIOUS AND PARTLY OF A SECURITY NATURE. DAYAN IS THE SUPPLIER OF IDEAS AND IN CHARGE OF MOVES AND TACTICS. HE IS THE TOPMOST CONFIDENTIAL

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ADVISER ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO AN ATTENTIVE BEGIN. HE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO MOVE BEGIN FROM HIS POSITION, BUT IT IS HIS DUTY TO TELL HIM THE ENTIRE TRUTH AND NOTHEING BUT."

14. IT IS SIMPLY TOO EARLY TO PREDICT HOW THIS RELATIONSHIP WILL DEVELOP. ONE THOUGHTFUL OBSERVER OF THE LOCAL SCENE HAS PREDICTED THAT DAYAN WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO REMAIN IN THE CABINET IF BEGIN SHOWS AN UNWILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE. ONE OF THE REASONS DAYAN AGREED TO SERVE AS FOREIGN MINISTER WAS BECAUSE HE FELT HE COULD CONTRIBUTE A MEASURE OF FLEXIBILITY AND IF HE IS UNABLE TO OVERCOME BEGIN'S REGIDITY, HE WOULD RESIGN. THE SAME OBSERVER AGREED WITH OUR ANALYSIS (ABOVE) OF BEGIN'S INEXPERIENCE AND POSED THE FOLLOWING QUESTION: AS BEGIN GAINS CONFIDENCE AND EXPERIENCE INTERNATIONALLY, WILL BE HE CONTENT TO LET DAYAN CARRY ON AS ISRAEL'S INTERNATIONAL SPOKESMAN? ANOTHER OBSERVER PUT IT SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY AND SAID THAT BEGIN AND DAYAN ARE WORKING TOGETHER NOW BUT PAST HISTORY WOULD INDICATE THAT DAYAN WILL BECOME FRUSTRATED UNLESS HE IS GIVEN SOME LATITUDE FOR INITIATIVE.

FOR THE MOMENT, BEGIN MAY BE WILLING TO GIVE DAYAN SOME LATITUDE; DAYAN NOW HAS NO POLITICAL POWER BASE AND BEGIN IS COMFORTABLE WITH THEIR RELATIONSHIP. IF DAYAN SHOULD DEVELOP AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL STRENGTH, BEGIN WILL BECOME SUSPICIOUS OF HIM AND REIN HIM IN.

15. IN CONCLUSION, WE SEE A DIFFERENCE EVOLVING IN THE WAY DECISIONS ARE REACHED BY THIS CABINET FROM THOSE OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT. THE RABIN GOVERNMENT, IN THOSE CASES WHEN IT WAS ABLE TO REACH A DECISION, USUALLY DID SO ONLY AFTER CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION AMONG THE VARIOUS MINISTERS BEFORE DECISIONS WERE ANNOUNCED. THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS BASED ON A MORE COHESIVE
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COALITION, HEADED BY A DECISIVE AND FORCEFUL PRIME MINISTER WITH A TALENTED AND CAPABLE FOREIGN MINISTER, APPEARS MORE LIKELY TO MAKE AND ANNOUNCE ITS DECISIONS FOR ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL REASONS AND FOR POLITICAL IMPACT AND THEN, AFTER THE FACT, TO COORDINATE THE ACTIVITIES OF VARIOUS MINISTERS. WHETHER THIS STYLE OF DECISION-MAKING WILL PERSIST AS THE GOVERNMENT BECOMES SETTLED IN AND WHETHER DAYAN WILL BE GIVEN FREER REIN BY BEGIN AS ISRAEL APPROACHES MINISTERIAL TALKS THIS MONTH AND/OR NEGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE FIRST INDICATION MAY COME IN THE DEGREE OF LATITUDE GRANTED TO DAYAN FOR HIS DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK LATER THIS MONTH.
LEWIS

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